

Male Sex Workers' Constructions of Selling Sex in South Africa

Authors : Tara Panday, Despina Learmonth

Abstract : Sex work is often constructed as being an interaction between male clients and female sex workers. As a result, street-based male sex workers are continuously overlooked in the South African literature. This qualitative study explored male sex workers' subjective experiences and constructions of their male clients' identities and the client-sex worker relationship. This research was conducted from a social-constructionist perspective, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the reasons and context driving the choices and actions of male sex workers. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 South African men working as sex workers in Cape Town. Data was analysed through thematic analysis. The findings of the study construct the client-sex worker relationship in terms of a professional relationship, constrained choice, sexual identity and need, as well as companionship for pay, potentially highlighting underlying reasons for supply and demand. The data which emerged around the client-sex worker relationship and the clients' identities also served to illuminate the power-dynamics in the client-sex worker relationship. This data increases insight into the exploitation and disempowerment experienced by male sex workers through verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, and unfairly enforced laws and regulations. The findings of this study suggest that, in the context of South Africa, male sex workers' experiences of the client-sex worker relationship cannot be completely understood without considering the intersectionality of the triple stigmatisation of: the criminality of sex work, race, and the lack of economic power, which systematically maintains marginalization. Motivating for the Law Reform Commission to continue to review all emerging research may assist with guiding related policy and thereby, the provision of equal human rights and adequate health and social interventions for all sex workers in South Africa.

Keywords : human rights, prostitution, power relations, sex work

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